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**Seattle-King County Department of Public Health**

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AUG 05 1986  
Superfund Branch

MIDWAY  
HEALTH REPORT NUMBER 6

During the past two months, representatives from the Seattle-King County Health Department, the City of Seattle, and the State Department of Ecology have been discussing the topic of a health survey in your area with Dr. Tom Burbacher from the Department of Environmental Health at the University of Washington. We thought that it would be a good idea to have Dr. Burbacher describe some of the details of these discussions with you in this newsletter. We hope this information will give you a better idea of what a health survey means and what a survey can and cannot do for you. We encourage you to think about the issues that Dr. Burbacher presents in this newsletter and to let us know how you feel about the various options that are being considered at this time. You can contact Jane Lee at the Health Department at 587-2722 or Dr. Burbacher directly at 545-2696 with your comments.

Before I begin to discuss the health survey, I think that it is important to take a look at where we are now. Currently, the health agencies have recorded information regarding several individual reports of health problems from residents who live around the landfill. A summary of these reports was presented in Health Bulletin #5. These reports provide specific information about those individuals who called the Midway Information Center to talk to the public health nurse. These reports, therefore, provide very little information regarding the general health status of the overall community. The health agencies also have the results of the tests conducted so far regarding air, water, and soil contamination. According to the agencies, the results of these tests do not indicate that a major public health threat exists for your community. However, during the next year an extensive investigation will be performed. This investigation will further evaluate the extent of the environmental contamination off site of the landfill. In my opinion, the major question to be answered at this time is, "What kinds of activities can be undertaken during this investigation to better define the health status of your community."

In response to this question, I have started a project to identify the appropriate activities that could be initiated to address the health issues. This project will include a review of previous health studies that have been performed at other "Superfund" sites around the country; a review of the information that is available at this time regarding the health problems of residents in your area; and a review of past and future environmental monitoring activities. This project will also provide recommendations to the health agencies regarding the objectives and scope of a health survey in your community.

Some of the objectives of a health survey that have been discussed include (1) determining the prevalence of various reported health problems in a defined "study area"; (2) determining the prevalence of various reported health problems in a defined "study area" and a "control area"; and (3) determining the relationship between various reported health problems and environmental problems in the "study area".

A survey developed to meet objective (1) would include interviews of families in the "study area" to gather information regarding the various health problems of these families. The information gathered from this survey would indicate the types of problems that are common, what age and sex groups are having these problems, and where these problems are occurring. Results of this survey would not indicate whether these problems are more common in the "study area". This survey also would not relate the reported health problems to any environmental problem.

A survey developed to meet objective (2) would provide the same information as above. This survey, however, would also include collecting information on families that are similar to those who live in the "study area" but do not live near the landfill. The results of this survey, then, would indicate if the reported problems experienced by families in the "study area" are more common than those of the families who live outside the area. The most important aspect of this study is identifying a suitable control area.

A survey developed to meet objective (3) would provide similar information regarding health problems as above. This survey, however, would also include procedures to use the environmental data. The environmental data would be used to investigate any relationships between environmental problems and reported health problems. This survey would assume that the results of the environmental monitoring indicate varying levels of contaminants in the "study area".

Another important aspect of a health survey relates to the scope of the study. Regardless of the objectives, decisions will have to be made regarding how many people to include in the survey; how extensive a questionnaire is needed; what specific health problems should be addressed; should school records and medical records be reviewed. These decisions will ultimately affect the results of the study and will determine the cost and length of time it will take to perform the study.

A few words of caution. The health surveys reviewed above will not provide quick and simple answers to all of your problems. All of these surveys will take a great deal of time (over one year), will cost a great deal of money (up to 1 million dollars) and still will not answer all of your questions. A health survey is not designed to provide individual "causes" for individual health problems. A survey can provide important information for your community. The survey can provide data regarding the prevalence of some specific reported health problems in your community. A survey can also indicate whether these reported problems occur in areas of known environmental contamination. Finally, a survey can provide important information concerning the general health status of your community at this time.

The health surveys reviewed above will require a long term commitment from your community. Each one of you will have to decide whether you are willing to spend a few hours sharing personal and medical information about your family with the surveyors. Only with a commitment from a great majority of the community will the surveys succeed. Judging from recent responses to public meetings and requests for public input in previous newsletters, it is doubtful at this time that enough community participation in a health survey could be generated to conduct a meaningful survey.

Let me know what you think. I am now in the process of scheduling small neighborhood meetings with groups who would like to discuss the health issues further. The only way that you will be sure that your concerns will be dealt with is to state them now. You can write to me or call at the address or phone number below.

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